

King Charles, the politics of muirburn and wildfires

Description



Recent muirburn (within last few months) at side of track from Corgarff to Brown Cow Hill on the Delnadamph Estate. Note the burned gorse. Photo credit Gordon Bulloch May 2025

Following my post on King Charles and the muirburn which took place on his estate at Delnadamph on 27th February, a very windy day ([see here](#)), I submitted a Freedom of Information request to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) to see if their control centre at Dundee had been notified, as per the provisions of Muirburn Code. They replied on 31st March:

Was the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service notified by the Delnadamph Estate (managed as Balmoral) that muirburn would take place on Thursday 27th February? (I understand appropriate control centre is North, Dundee). If so, what was the response from the SFRS the high winds forecast that day and the very high fire warning for north east Scotland issued days later)?

In response:

We have searched our Operations Control and Command system for 27th February 2025 and there are no indications of a call being received reporting muirburn where the address passed by the caller has been Delnadamph Estate. This is a large estate and the location details entered by Dundee Operations would be completely dependent on that passed by the caller. There are 2 incidents of Controlled Burns recorded within that vicinity on 27th February:

Incident 041436 Allargue House, A939 and A944 at Colnabaichin to Moray Boundary at the
Corgarff, Strathdon Time of Call 12:06

Incident 041458 Boilhandy Cottage, A939, Glenfenzie access road to A944 at Colnabaichin
Corgarff, Strathdon Time of Call 13:15

On receipt of calls to muirburn Operations Control would record the details passed by the caller. It is the responsibility of the landowner to be aware of weather warnings which may impact their burn.

What this tells you is that some estates are notifying the SFRS, as per the Muirburn Code, but not Delnadamph owned by the King. It is no wonder voluntary measures to improve land management don't work if King Charles ignores them. Where the royals lead, others follow.



More burned gorse and heather Delnadamph May 2025. Photo credit Gordon Bulloch May 2025.

While notifications to the SFRS may not seem as important as the damage that muirburn is wreaking on the natural environment, the two issues are actually connected. After writing about the out of control muirburn which resulted in even more damaging wildfires in Glen Shee ([see here](#)) and Glen Banchor ([see here](#)), I submitted another Information Request to the SFRS at the end of April with links to these two posts asking a) if they had been notified of the muirburn along Glen Shee and Glen Clunie undertaken by the Invercauld and Rhiedarroch Estates b) if so, the SFRS response and c) if any wildfires in the Cairngorms National Park had been reported to them.

I received a very helpful response from SFRS on 10th June [EIR-0004-2025.26 Nick Kempe](#) apologising for the delay, explaining the information team was short staff and they had to do a manual trawl through their Control system to see if they held the information. Their efforts are appreciated and provide further information that the current system for reporting muirburn and recording wildfires is completely unfit for purpose. The SFRS had no record of either the Invercauld or the Rhiedarroch Estates notifying them of any occasion they conducted muirburn this year. Where King Charles leads, others follow.

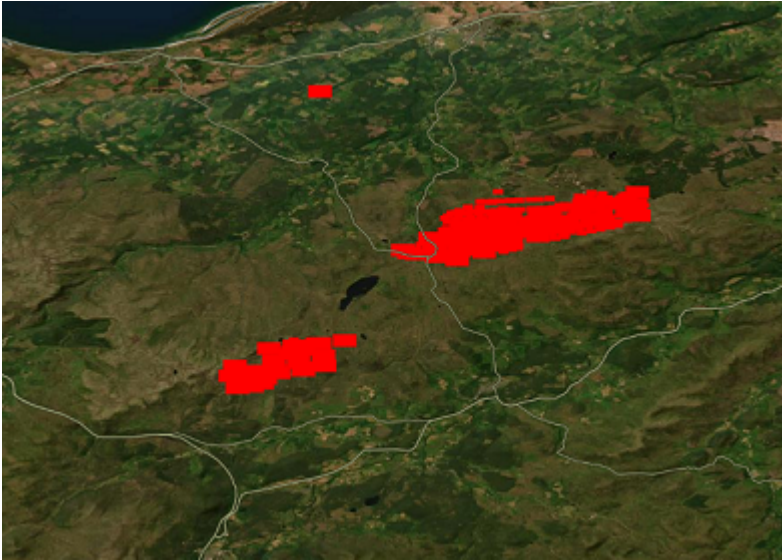
Even more seriously neither the Rhiedorrach nor the Glen Banchor estate notified the SFRS of the wildfires they had caused:

c) any wildfires in the Cairngorms National Park caused by muirburn and reported to the SFRS between 1st January and 13th April 2025. My post published today on parkswatchscotland to <https://parkswatchscotland.co.uk/2025/04/14/reckless-incompetent-and-damaging-muirburn-the-cairngorms-national-park-time-for-a-complete-ban/> and previous posts on the fires in Glen Shee provides the background to my request.

Despite extensively searching the Command and Control system there was no trace of any wildfires caused by muirburn at this location. Therefore, the SFRS consider the exemption Regulation 10(4)(a) of the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 information not held applicable.

The explanation for the extraordinary claim by Marcus Humphrey, the national wildfire lead for SFRS, that *“Current evidence does not suggest muirburn causes wildfires”* ([see here](#)) is very simple. Landowners and their staff don't report them and no-one else is monitoring the number of fires caused by muirburn.

In the last few days wildfires have been in the news again because of the huge wildfire/s reported on Dava Moor ([see here](#)). There were in fact two distinct wildfires, one of which was within the Cairngorms National Park and the other to the north of it:



Map credit NASA FIRMS database

Both fires would appear to have burned areas subject to muirburn, new native woodland plantations and commercial forestry and are likely to have caused serious economic and environmental costs. Since then at least one further fire has broken out in the area when no warnings of high fire risk appear to have been issued by SFRS. Why?

SFRS, which recently issued a news release ([see here](#)) stating over 3000 fires were started deliberately last summer in Scotland as this post has shown they have no means of recording deliberate Muirburn and when it gets out of control must now produce a public report on the cause of these fires (one was claimed on social media to have been caused by an angler's fire getting out of control). And the Cairngorms National Park Authority needs to report on lessons for their Integrated Wildfire Management Plan ([see here](#)).

If the Scottish Government is serious about limiting the damaging impacts of muirburn and wildfires, however, it needs to ensure that SFRS has the (digital) systems in place to monitor and record both muirburn and wildfires and their impacts. Until we have that data any fire prevention and management plans, like that in the Cairngorms National Park Authority ([see here](#)), will continue to be driven by the interests of sporting landowners like King Charles rather than those of public.

The public consultation on the future of the fire service, launched on 25th June ([see here](#)), contains no proposals to address these issues but instead lays out options for further reductions in provision of appliances and crews. The inability of the SFRS to put out wildfires around Moray shows how foolhardy that is and how out of touch their management are with reality.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. forestry
3. grouse moors

4. muirburn
5. natural environment
6. Scottish Government

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